

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----036862 062205Z /61
O 061834Z JUL 78
FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2425

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 HAVANA 1903

NODIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: ASEC CU
SUBJ: USMC SECURITY GUARD DETAINED AND RELEASED

REF: HAVANA 1902

1. SUMMARY: DETAILED REPORT OF REFTEL INCIDENT FOLLOWS. USINT RECOMMENDS THAT DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZE DISPATCH OF NOTE FROM USINT TO CUBAN GOVERNMENT PROTESTING UNJUSTIFIED DETENTION, REQUESTING ASSURANCES THAT SUCH INCIDENTS WILL NOT BE REPEATED, AND INSISTING ON RETURN OF SEIZED CAMERA EQUIPMENT AND BICYCLE. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF REFTEL DETENTION INCIDENT WAS PROVIDED BY USMC SECURITY GUARD SERGEANT KURTIS LEON JOHNSON AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM CUBAN CUSTODY AT 2130 LOCAL TIME, WEDNESDAY, JUL 5. (FYI JOHNSON WAS PREPARING, EVEN BEFORE DETENTION INCIDENT OCCURRED, TO DEPART CUBA, JULY 6, UPON TERMINATION OF HIS TOUR HERE. HE DEPARTED WITHOUT INCIDENT TO JAMAICA, JULY 6. END FYI.)

3. BEFORE LEAVING CUBA, JOHNSON WISHES TO TAKE BICYCLE SIGHT-SEEING AND PHOTO EXCURSION ALONG BEACHES TO EAST OF HAVANA. ACCORDINGLY, EMBASSY CHAUFFEUR TRANSPORTED HIM AND BICYCLE TO VILLAGE OF JIBACOA (ABOUT 35 MILES EAST OF HAVANA). AT JIBACOA, JOHNSON (USING PENTAX CAMERA WITH 230 MM ZOOM LENS) TOOK ABOUT EIGHT PHOTOS OF VILLAGE HOUSES. AT ABOUT

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12 NOON, HE BEGAN BICYCLING BACK TOWARD HAVANA. ENROUTE, HE STOPPED PERIODICALLY AND TOOK ABOUT SIX OR SEVEN PHOTOS OF RURAL HOUSES, MONUMENTS, AND RESTAURANTS. JOHNSON STATES THAT HE TOOK NO PHOTOS OF MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, MILITARY PERSONNEL, NOR ANY OTHER OBJECT THAT COULD REMOTELY BE ASSOCIATED WITH MILITARY AFFAIRS. INDEED, JOHNSON SAYS THAT HE DID NOT SEE, OTHER THAN AT BUS STOPS AND ONCE IN

RESTURANT AT VILLAGE OF BOCA DE JARUCO (SEE PARA 4 BELOW),
ANY MILITARY PERSONNEL DURING HIS TRIP. JOHNSON STATES
THAT HE TOOK ONLY ONE PHOTO FACING INLAND - A SMALL VILLAGE.

4. JOHNSON ARRIVED NEAR VILLAGE OF BOCA D E JARUCO AT ABOUT
1500 LOCAL TIME AND STOPPED FOR BEER IN RESTAURANT. AT
RESTAURANT, UNIFORMED MILITARY MAN APPROACHED HIM AND ENGAGED
IN CASUAL CONVERSATION ON WHAT COUNTRY HE (JOHNSON) WAS FROM.
MILITARY MAN DEPARTED, AND JOHNSON CONTINUED BICYCLING BUT
WAS STOPPED BY THREE BORDER GUARD ENLISTED PERSONNEL IN JEEP
OUTSIDE BOCA DE JARUCO AT 1515 LOCAL TIME. AFTER RELAXED CONVERSATION

,
BORDER GUARDS KEPT JOHNSON WAITING BY ROAD FOR ABOUT ONE HOUR
WHILE THEY TALKED BY RADIO WITH THEIR HEADQUARTERS. (JOHNSON,
WHO WAS NOT CARRYING PASSPORT, SHOWED HIS CUBAN DIPLOMATIC MARKET
IDENTIFICATION CARD.BORDER GUARDS DID NOT ASK FOR
HIS CAMERA.)

5. AT ABOUT 1615 LOCAL TIME, OFFICER ON MOTORCYCLE ARRIVED
AND TOLD JOHNSON TO FOLLOW HIM TO BORDER GUARD STATION
AT BUANABO (ABOUT TWENTY MILES EAST OF HAVANA). UPON
ARRIVING AT BUANQBO AT ABOUT 1630, JOHNSON WAS PERFUNCT-
ORILY QUESTIONED BY BORDER GUARD OFFICER WHO LOOKED AT HIS
IDENTIFICATION, ASKED WHAT PHOTOS HE HAD TAKEN, AND MADE
NUMEROUS TELEPHONE CALLS (DURING WHICH HE PASSED ON DATA
ON CAMERA). AT ONE POINT, ENLISTED MAN WITH HANDWRITTEN
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REPORT OF THREE PAGES ENTERED ROOM. AT ABOUT 1840, ANOTHER
UNIFORMED OFFICER ARRIVED AND NUDGED JOHNSON INTO CAR
WHICH TOOK HIM TO STATE SECURITY HEADQUARTERS (VILLA MARISTA)
IN OUTSKIRTS OF HAVANA.

6. JOHNSON ARRIVED AT VILLA MARISTA AT ABOUT 1925. HIS
CAMERA WAS REMOVED, BUT HE WAS NOT REQUIRED TO SURRENDER
HIS PERSONAL BELONGINGS. JOHNSON'S POSSESSIONS WERE PHOTOGRAPHED,
BUT HE PERSONALLY WAS NEITHER PHOTOGRAPHED NOR
FINGERPRINTED. JOHNSON AGAIN SHOWED HIS CUBAN DIPLOMATIC
MARKET IDENTIFICATION, HIS LUXEMBOURG DRIVERS' LICENSE (HIS
LAST POST), BUT DID NOT SHOW HIS MILITARY IDENTIFICATION.
AFTER DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN CUBAN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN DRESSED
PERSONNEL, JOHNSON WAS LET INTO INTERROGATION ROOM WHERE
HE WAS QUESTIONED BY UNIFORMED CUBAN OFFICER. HE WAS ASKED
HIS NAME, HIS PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT, DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH,
LOCAL RESIDENCE, US RESIDENCE, AND PARENTS' NAMES. HE WAS
THEN ASKED WHETHER HE WAS MEMBER OF US MARINE CORPS AND
LENGTH OF HIS SERVICE. PURSUANT TO STANDARD POST INSTRUCTIONS,
JOHNSON REPLIED AFFIRMATIVELY.

7. CUBAN OFFICER, DURING FIFTEEN MINUTE QUESTIONING,

ASKED WHAT HE WAS DOING, WHY HE WAS TAKING PICTURES, AND TOLD JOHNSON THAT HE WAS BEING DETAINED FOR HAVING PHOTOGRAPHED MILITARY INSTALLATION. CUBAN SAID, "THIS (INCIDENT) IS VERY BAD FOR YOU. YOU WILL BE HERE FOR LONG TIME." CUBAN WOULD NOT ALLOW JOHNSON TO USE TELEPHONE, DESPITE REPEATED REQUESTS.

8. ONE-HALF HOUR LATER, JOHNSON WAS TAKEN INTO ANOTHER ROOM WITH A DESK. HE WAS GIVEN PAPER BY CUBAN OFFICER AND TOLD TO WRITE WHAT OFFICER WOULD SAY (I.E., TO TAKE DICTATION FROM CUBAN). JOHNSON REFUSED TO DO SO AND WAS AGAIN TOLD HE WOULD BE THERE FOR LONG TIME. AT ABOUT 2130, JOHNSON WAS PLACED IN CAR WITH ARMED MEN AND TAKEN TO OTHER BUILDING WHERE HE WAS HANDED OVER TO ACTING USINT CHIEF (SEE BELOW).

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9. ACTING USINT CHIEF (GLASSMAN) WAS CALLED TO MINISTRY OF FOREIGN RELATIONS (MINREX) BY CHIEF OF PROTOCOL (MELENDEZ) AT ABOUT 1845 LOCAL TIME, JULY 5. MELENDEZ SAID THAT JOHNSON HAD BEEN DETAINED NEAR JARUCO FOR HAVING PHOTOGRAPHED "MILITARY UNIT". HE SAID MINREX HAD BEEN INFORMED OF DETENTION AT ABOUT 1800, THAT JOHNSON WOULD BE BROUGHT TO HAVANA, AND THAT USINT COULD SEE HIM NEXT DAY, THURSDAY, JULY 6. ACTING USINT CHIEF SAID THAT INCIDENT COULD HAVE EXTRAORDINARY POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES AND THAT CUBANS SHOULD RELEASE JOHNSON IMMEDIATE. MELENDEZ SPOKE WITH ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER ANILLO AND SAID THAT HE WOULD BE IN CONTACT SHORTLY.

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FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2426

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10. AT 1945, MELENDEZ PICKED UP ACTING USINT CHIEF AND TOOK HIM TO HOME OF VICE-PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ. RODRIGUEZ, CONSTANTLY SMILING, SAID THAT HONSON HAD COMMITTED A "GRAVE INFRACTION" IN PHOTOGRAPHING A "SPECIFIC" (PERHAPS WITH IMPLICATION OF "SPECIAL") "MILITARY UNIT". (MELENDEZ INTERJECTED THAT OFFENSE OCCURRED TO LEFT-THAT IS, PRESUMABLY ON INLAND SIDE, OF COASTAL HIGHWAY BETWEEN JARUCO AND GUANABO.) SECURITY FORCES, ACCORDING TO RODRIGUEZ, WANTED TO CARRY CASE TO TRIAL TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR EFFICIENCY AND FACT THAT CUBA IS NOT DEFENSELESS. FIDEL CASTRO, IN VIEW OF POLITICAL SITUATION, HOWEVER, HAD DECIDED TO TURN OVER JOHNSON TO USINT. BUT CUBANS WOULD KEEP CAMERA AND FILM.

11. RODRIGUEZ, WITHOUT MENTIONING WORD "MARINES", SAID THAT CUBANS REALIZING USINT DIFFICULTIES, HAD BEEN TOLERANT OF PRESENCE OF AMERICANS OVER AGREED LIMIT OF TEN. RODRIGUEZ STATED THAT USINT SHOULD WARN ITS PEOPLE "OVER TEN MAN LIMIT" (MARINE SECURITY GUARDS) TO AVOID PROBLEMS AND THAT CUBANS WOULD TAKE SIMILAR MEASURES ON THEIR SIDE.

12. ACTING USINT CHIEF REPLIED THAT JOHNSON CASE CLEARLY DID NOT INVOLVE EXPIONAGE OR BAD INTENTIONS AND THAT, IF ANY PHOTO WAS TAKEN OF MILITARY INSTALLATION (THIS CONVERSATION OCCURRED BEFORE JOHNSON WAS TURNED OVER), IT WAS A MISTAKE AND REGRETTABLE. ACTING USINT CHIEF ADDED THAT,
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BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER ANY ACT HAD OCCURRED, IT WAS NECESSARY, HOWEVER, TO SEE JOHNSON. ACTING USINT CHIEF ADDED THAT THIS INCIDENT WAS SERIOUS AND UNFORTUNATE AND THAT MOST PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON WOULD, CORRECTLY OR INCORRECTLY, ASSOCIATE IT WITH ARREST OF INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER REPRESENTATIVE IN MOSCOW. RODRIGUEZ STATED THAT HE AND FIDEL CASTRO HAD BEEN CONCERNED OVER WHETHER JOHNSON INCIDENT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DELIBERATELY SET UP BY INDIVIDUALS IN WASHINGTON WHO WISHED TO WRECK US-CUBAN RELATIONS. ACTING USINT CHIEF POINTED OUT THAT JOHNSON WAS SIMPLE AND ORDINARY PERSON, WHO WAS NOT RESPONDING TO ORDERS FROM ANYONE.

13. AT ABOUT 2115, ACTING USINT CHIEF WAS TAKEN BY CHIEF OF PROTOCOL TO STATE SECURITY HEADQUARTERS. COMMANDER OF FACILITY AND ABOUT FOUR OTHER UNIFORMED OFFICERS WERE PRESSNT. AFTER JOHNSON TOLD ACTING USINT CHIEF THAT HE HAD NOT PHOTOGRAPHED ANY MILITARY FACILITIES, ACTING USINT CHIEF STATED THAT DETENTION APPEARED TOTALLY UNWARRANTED. CHIEF OF STATE SECURITY HEADQUARTERS REPLIED THAT BORDER GUARD, NOT STATE SECURITY, HAD MADE ARREST. MINREX CHIEF OF PROTOCOL

RECALLED EARLIER STATEMENT BY CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ THAT BOTH SIDES, INCLUDING CUBANS, WOULD HAVE TO TAKE MEASURES TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS FROM OCCURRING. REVERSING EARLIER STAND BY CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, MELENDEZ SAID THAT JOHNSON'S CAMERA, LENSES, AND BICYCLE WOULD BE RETURNED UPON RECEIPT OF NOTE FROM USINT.

14. COMMENT: ATTEMPT OF STATE SECURITY OFFICIALS TO SHIFT BLAME TO BORDER GUARDS (THOUGH THEY CONTINUED TO INSIST THAT DEVELOPMENT OF ROLL OF FILM WILL PROVE MILITARY INSTALLATION HAD BEEN PHOTOGRAPHED) AND CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ' AND MELENDEZ' STATEMENTS THAT BOTH SIDES, NOT JUST US, SHOULD TAKE MEASURES TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS, LEAD US TO SUSPECT
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THAT CASE MAY INVOLVE SIMPLY OVERZEALOUSNESS ON PART OF BORDER GUARDS. ON OTHER HAND, FAILURE OF CUBANS TO RELEASE JOHNSON FOR MORE THAN SIX HOURS AFTER DETENTION AND ATTEMPT OF STATE SECURITY PERSONNEL TO COERCE HIM, ALBEIT ONLY PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND PERFUNCTORILY, LEAVE GROUNDS AT LEAST FOR SUSPICION THAT INCIDENT WAS PREMEDITATED. (INFLUENCE OF SOVIETS AT VILLA MARISTA WAS EVIDENT BOTH IN LENIN PORTRAITS, ALONG WITH FIDEL AND RAUL, AND "MOSKVA"-EMBLAZONED DESK SETS AND ASH TRAYS). DEPARTMENT SHOULD NOTE THAT USINT SECRETARY WAS HARASSED BY TELEPHONE, JULY 2, (SEE HAVANA 1872).

15. ACTION REQUESTED: USINT REQUESTS AUTHORIZATION TO DISPATCH NOTE TO CUBAN GOVERNMENT PROTESTING UNJUSTIFIED DETENTION OF JOHNSON, UNACCEPTABLE DELAY IN NOTIFYING USINT, AND THIS IMPROPER INTERROGATION. NOTE WOULD REQUEST ASSURANCES FROM CUBAN GOVERNMENT THAT SUCH INCIDENTS WILL NOT BE REPEATED AND WOULD ALSO INSIST ON RETURN OF SEIZED CAMERA, LENSES, AND BICYCLE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DETENTION, REPORTS, SECURITY GUARDS, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978HAVANA01903
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P840166-1836
Format: TEL
From: HAVANA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Message ID: b277827a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 78 HAVANA 1902
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2107221
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: USMC SECURITY GUARD DETAINED AND RELEASED
TAGS: ASEC, PINS, CU, US, (JOHNSON, KURTIS LEON)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b277827a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014